

BEYOND

CHALLENGING SOFTWARE

COMMODORE 64 version

the TOPICS at midnight



NOW For the
COMMODORE 64

By Mike Singleton
conversion by TAG & The KID
(INCENTIVE)

Index

Introduction 3

Midnight Chronicles

Chapter 1: Luxor and Morke 4

Chapter 2: The Skutumpah 6

Chapter 3: Corloth the Fey 9

Chapter 4: The Tower of the Moon 12

Chapter 5: The Solstice 18

Guide to Play

Loading instructions 20

Starting off 20

Saving a game in progress 20

Abandoning a game 20

Your role 20

A choice of games 21

Victory for Doomsdark 21

The Ice Fear and the Moon Ring 21

The Keyboard

Controlling a character 22

Selecting a character 22

How the game works 23

The Sun 23

The Warring Factions

Engaging in battle 23

The Map of Midnight 23

The Free and the Foul 24

The Landscape

Looking around 26

Midnight's features 26

Controls at a glance 28

Pythron: the Blade of this tape 29

Enter the Beyond Club 30

The Map

32

Using this booklet

Welcome to the World's first-ever Epic game, The Lords of Midnight.

It more closely resembles a fantasy film than a computer game but the main difference is that you are in control of the main characters and whether you lead them to victory or defeat, the story is written around your exploits. The game sets the scene, controls the forces of evil and independent characters which move in and out of the plot and drives the landscape of Midnight and its people in a way never before seen in any computer game.

Author Mike Singleton has produced a game which can be played as a quest, a mighty wargame, or merely as a walk through the spectacular scenery of Midnight.

To see this scenery for yourself, load up the game (instructions are on page 20). While it is loading, read Mike's own introduction to the game (opposite). Try moving through the scenery using the compass keys to look around and the Move key to go forward in the direction you are facing.

You will find you own four characters: Luxor, Morke, Corloth and Northon including these keys will enable you to switch between them. Try and discover where your characters are on the map.

Someday you will hopefully realise that the Lords of Midnight is something special and will be tempted to read the Chronicles of Midnight to ensure you make the most of the experience which awaits you.

A full guide to play begins on page 20.

There will be two more Epic games making up the Midnight trilogy coming soon from Mike. Doomsdark's Revenge details Luxor's quest to rescue the captured Morke in the lands beyond the icy wastes. And The Eye of the Moon is the story of Morke's search for the magical jewel which can look into the future. It takes place in the lands south of Midnight.

Commodore 64 conversion by Tap & The Rat (Incentive Software)

the LORDS of Midnight

AN INTRODUCTION

The Lords of Midnight is not simply an adventure game nor simply a war game. It is totally a new type that we have chosen to call an epic game. For as you play the Lords of Midnight you will be writing a new chapter in the history of the peoples of the First.

You will guide individual characters across the land of Midnight on vital quests but you will also command armies that must endeavour to hold back the foul hordes of Doomdark, the Witchking. Nor will your task be easy for your computer is programmed to play the role of the Witchking and provide a guiding intelligence for the forces of evil ranged against you. Yours will be no inevitable victory.

Above all, at every stage of the game, you will only see the land of Midnight through the eyes of the characters and commanders you control. You will see no map plotting with unerring accuracy your own and the enemy's dispositions. Instead, as you switch your attention to each of the characters you control, you will see only what they would see from the spot where they stand: a panoramic view drawn in full perspective. Looking into the distance, you will see the mountains and forests and hills of the lands of Midnight. You will see armies ramped on the plains, great cities rising in the distance, the forlorn ruins of long forgotten fortresses. And if you wish to see what lies beyond that mountain range, beyond that dark forest, you must move forward and look for yourself!

We have called this unique feature "landscape", for it gives you the power to journey through the landscape of Midnight in the very same way as any traveller or captain of war, as you move forward and your path twists and turns, the landscape changes just as it would if you were really walking through Midnight. To achieve this effect, the Lords of Midnight program can create no less than 32,000 different panoramic views!

On the following pages, you will find the prelude to this epic game, the first passage of the chapter you must write in the long Book of Midnight. The story sets the scene for the events that will unfold in the game. It contains no vital clues to the defeat of Doomdark but serves to remind you of the desperate nature of your task and of the price of failure. We recommend you read it before embarking on your quest for victory. Further on, you will find our "Guide to Play" - this is vital reading!

Good luck go with you on your quest and fare thee well!

Mike Singleton



LUXOR AND MORKIN

Luxor stood at the doorway of the hut, gazing into the white gloom of the forest. A thin scatter of ash, the fine powder-dust of the new snow, was floating down onto the frozen ground. It was time, thought Luxor, it was time. An icicle of fear touched him and shivered through him. He drew his cloak tightly around himself, as though it would warm the chill in his heart, and turned from the forest.

"You are troubled, my Lord," said Morkin. The boy looked up at Luxor, his face a mirror of the man's sadness.

"The world is troubled," said the Forest Keeper. He threw another log onto the fire and sent a flock of sparks flying into the smoky darkness of his hut.

"Come and warm yourself by the fire, my Lord," said the boy. He stood up and offered the stool he was occupied on.

"No, Morkin, we must go. The Solstice draws nigh upon us and Doomdark is already waking from his slumber. We must reach the Tower of the Moon by sun-arrow yet our ride promises to be long and perilous.

"The horses, my Lord?"

"Yes, fetch them and let's be on our journey."

The boy scurried out. Luxor turned to the Forest Keeper.

"Your fire and shelter have been a precious gift, Keeper. I thank you.

If you and your young spouse can keep Doomdark's stain from my trees, you're more than welcome," growled the Keeper. Then, grudgingly he added, "My Lord," and opened the fire.

Luxor turned and strode out of the hut into the deep forest. Morkin was already working his horse, waiting. Luxor swung himself up onto the saddle of his white-war-stallion. Then, at a word to the horses, they rode off into the trees. First was stilling and in an hour there was no trace of their passing.

For many hours they rode in silence. Luxor lost in his thoughts, the boy watching the forest in a mixture of fear and fascination. He had heard the tale many told and could not quite believe they were only tales. No, the forest, he said to himself, and lovely beauty, its trees standing still as stones but each breathing a deadly power from the earth that could thrust them as tall as towers, towards the sky. Morkin felt smaller than he had ever felt.

As darkness neared, the boy grew tired of the forest and turned to speak to his Lord. Luxor was going into the distance as though in a dream.

"Why does the Solstice trouble you, my Lord?" asked the boy.

Luxor turned his head slowly towards Morkin. For a few moments he said nothing and then, as though he had suddenly remembered, he began to speak.

"Our world wasn't always white, Morkin. You've heard the legends of Summer when the land was green and blooming with life. Ten thousand moons ago it was, so long that men barely believe such a time ever existed. Yet the Wise remember. They have scrolls that tell of the first snows falling and the first carpets of ice covering the land. Suddenly all the lands of Midnight were plunged into the winter of ice. Then came famine, a great famine that rose-girded our people, and with famine came war.

"But the Solstice, my Lord," insisted the boy.

"I am coming to it, Morkin, I am coming to it. The Wise shut themselves up in their towers and let war take its course. They had not forgotten the winter, yet they knew that war was the only way for the lands that had learned with people in the long moons of Summer, could not feed such a throng any longer. Only one of the Wise, Gryllon the Star-gazer stayed with his Lord and gave him much counsel concerning war and conquest. Gryllon was astute, his advice was well-measured, and soon the Lord he served was powerful throughout the lands of Midnight, no longer a mere Lord but, by conquest, a King.

"Was that Doomdark, then?" asked the boy.

"No, the King was not Doomdark. Lord Gidgarok reigned for but twelve moons before Gryllon had him overthrown and took the crown for himself. The people and the Lords were not

deposited, for they knew Crylfalon had advised wisely and they knew nothing of his crime. They told each other that Crylfalon the Wise would see them through. Some did after a fashion, but he ruled not through wisdom but through fear and slaughter and sorcery. As the years passed, an icy chill spread through the hearts of those not already enslaved to him. No longer did people call him Crylfalon the Wise but instead Doondark, Witchking of Midnight. Even this was his own doing, for it pleased him to know someone trembled in fear of him.

"So Doondark is one of the Wise?" said Morkan, in surprise.

"Who else but they could wield such power?" asked Luxor.

"You could, my Lord," the boy replied, fiercely.

Luxor smiled.

"Your heart speaks louder than your head, Morkan. I would not seek such power, even if I could wield it."

"But, my Lord, what of the Solstice? Why is the Solstice so important?"

"The Solstice, Morkan, is the deepest, darkest day of winter. The Wächung, by his sorcery, draws his power from the very winter itself; he sucks from its heart the cold that falls as snow and burns it by force to his own will. For many seasons now Midnight has known a first pistol while Doondark waits and prepares for the Solstice. Doondark's last full assault on the Fire was more than before you were born, Morkan, and even then we barely held him at bay. When the Solstice comes and winter is deepest, Doondark will draw more power than he has ever known from its icy heart. Then he will unleash all the hellhounds of Midnight against us and I fear we may not withstand him."

A stricken look passed across Morkan's bright face.

"How so, my Lord? We are the Free and you are the mightiest warrior in all of Midnight!" the boy exclaimed.

Luxor smiled warmly.

"Morkan, you do not mind this puzzle, but even if I went as you say it will take more than swords and strong arms to defeat the Wächung. In the last war he made against us, I slew some upon some of his foul creations yet always there were more to take their place. But worst was the ice fear, the cold blast of terror he sent creeping over the land to stab at men's hearts and turn their blood to water. This time it will be as cold as the Frozen Wastes."

"Even they can be crossed, so the legends say."

"Perhaps, Morkan, perhaps."

Morkan was silent for a moment, as though lost in thought. Then, as gravely as one of the Wise, he said: "It is was, my Lord."

"How so?" said Luxor.

The boy grinned mischievously.

"The time you've got me to help you!"

Luxor looked at the youngster, smiled and then roared with laughter, not at Morkan's ludicrous reasoning but at the enormity of his innocent, affectionate concern. Morkan, suddenly realising how foolish his words had sounded, burst into laughter too.

"Morkan," said the Lord Luxor still laughing, "I doubt the ice-fear could ever touch you. There's not a tick in it could harm."

"It couldn't catch me anyway!" said Morkan, suddenly galloping ahead.

Luxor shook his head in disbelief and galloped after his runaway square.



THE SKULKRIN

As Birkenst-seeped through the trees, the skulkryn shivered and grunted. Still asleep in a nest of leaves and branches, he cowered as he lay there and his tiny hands quivered in supplication.

"O Great One," he whispered, "Fawkrin would not fail you. Fawkrin is your faithfullest servant."

The skulkryn's long tongue lolled out to lick an absent head. A cold, crackling voice ring out as the creature's dream.

"Whet? I would not trust you further than I could kick you!"

As if to demonstrate, Doosdark leered the top of his back at the skulkryn's thin belly. Fawkrin half-expecting such a response, darted away but not swiftly enough. The blow caught him on the back and sent him sprawling. Doosdark sneered.

"Fool!"

The skulkryn poked himself up and dusted the splinters of ice from his ragged tunic.

You're too kind to Fawkrin. Great One. Fawkrin loves to be kicked around. Oh surely Fawkrin loves a sore backside, oh surely looking!" said the skulkryn, adding under his breath, "Great mound of filthiness."

In a withering voice, Doosdark whispered "Go."

Fawkrin cringed as the Withering's frozen breath rolled towards him, trailing a glittering cloud of ice as it clawed through the air. Fawkrin shivered, shook and woke.

"Must find Luxar," he muttered to himself. "Surely must."

Shaking himself as he stood up, the skulkryn peered at all his bodily parts to make sure they were still there, then scuttled off into the rank of the forest.

Fawkrin moved swiftly, skipping over the crisp snow where the ground was even, dropping to all fours when fallen trees and rocky boulders made a mountain range of the forest floor. For a few moments, he imagined he was a young skulkryn again, dancing along and carefree through the white wilderness, but presently he remembered, stopped and sniffed. The shimmering breath of the Withering stirred up his twitching nostrils but the new different warmth rangled with the numbing gloom of the forest, was welcome. The skulkryn shivered and sniffed again. There was another warmth there too — boy, warmth! His long tongue slithered out over his lips. A bite to wet would not go amiss.

Fawkrin found his quarry in a clearing. There was no fire, else he would have found them sooner, and the man and the boy were huddled under a makeshift roof of branches and ferns. Just as a snowfall, Fawkrin crept into the breach. He poked around in his tunic and from the grubby depths he fished out a small pouch of matted fur. From it, the skulkryn poured a heap of glowing white dust into his palm which he quickly sprinkled over the sleeping faces of the humans. Even so, Fawkrin felt a frosty numbness gripping his fingers like a glove of ice.

He muttered to himself "Rotten Doosdark magic. Could make magic that don't hurt Fawkrin, surely could." Then he shook his dazed little head and the fat blood trickle back whispering softly at the while.

It seemed that stars had fallen from the sky to settle on the heads of the man and the boy. One by one, each glinting spark faded and disappeared as the sleep frost melted into their skin. Fawkrin waited until the last glimmer had died, then edged closer to the man. He sniffed at the man's topknot with his nose wrinkling and twitching as he tested its warmth and texture. Then he gogged in delight.

"Khee khee khee! The great Lord Luxar! Khee khee! Now He won't kick Fawkrin on his backside, surely not."

The skulkryn's head down, brought his mouth close to Luxar's ear and in a mellow, soothing voice that seemed absurd from such a creature, he whispered, "Lord Luxar, great Lord Luxar, brave Lord Luxar, why have you come to the Forest of Shadows, tell me. Oh tell me where you are bound!"

Luxar stirred. Eyes still closed, his arm rose mechanically and his hand wavered towards the knifed forest. The skulkryn scurried away with a squeak of terror but Luxar's arms fell back.

afraid, to the ground. Fawkins crouched in the darkness a full minute before he found courage enough to crawl back to Luser. In truth, even this was simply the courage of necessity; his fear of Doomsdark resurfaced itself over his fear of the warlord.

"Great Lord Luser!" sang the skulkers, "Tell me where you are bound!"

The time, Luser did not stir. He spoke in a faint, weary manner.

"I have been called by the Wise," he sturred, "I have been called to their Council at the Tower of the Moon, tomorrow."

"But why tell me why?" crooned the skulkers.

"The Seers," Doomsdark grows stronger yet. We must act. I know no more. The Wise keep their own counsel."

Fawkins guessed this was the truth. Though a great warlord of the Free, even Luser would not be privy to the secrets of the Wise.

Still Great warlump, Might as well tell Doomsdark the sun will rise tomorrow. Some backside for Fawkins."

Then a thought struck the skulkers and he grinned jagged, twinkling grin.

"Great lord, how do you think of the Witchking?" hisses not, greaser thingy?" hissed the skulkers.

"Doomsdark is hog-spawn, a foul pestilence, a piece of stum adrift on the far waters of Midnight. If he thought like I think I would slay him in two breaths."

The skulkers convulsed in tremendous giggles. Though he shivered at the thought of Him there was nothing more deliciously exciting than to hear Him assailed. Suddenly, acid stomach trickled down Fawkins's neck. His laughter stopped just as suddenly and he clenched his hands together.

"I wasn't laughing, O Great One, oh no! Surely I was."

Only silence and the gentle whisper of the trees was the reply. The skulkers sighed and smiled crookedly.

Silly skulkers. Can't hurt you here, can He?"

He snickered round and turned to the weeping boy. He shuffled at his feet and shoulders and chest.

"Mmm. Frost-kiss so warm!" he declared.

Morkus was lying on his side towards the skulkers, with his bare forearms hooked in front of his face. Fawkins dugged another pouch from his tunic and poured some more white powder into his palm. Sparingly he sprinkled it over the boy's arm. No melting glow could be seen for this time the white dust was more mundane: it was salt. Fawkins opened his jaws wide and sucked eagerly forward.

Just as the skulkers's fangs were about to sink into the morsel prepared, Morkus opened his eyes. Had the skulkers been turned to ice, an event not unfamiliar to Doomsdark's servants, he could not have stopped in mid-bite more swiftly. For half a moment, Fawkins was at a loss and could only stare in amazement and terror. Then, a half-moment more and his gaping ate and suddenly transformed itself into a broad grin.

"Hello, youngster!" the skulkers gulped. He gulped again as a knife-point pricked sharply against his throat.

"If you so much as twitch, little furry one, you'll twitch no more. What's your business with us?" said Morkus.

"Nothing, youngster, nothing, surely. Fawkins only seeks warmth and shelter. Gots fine hospitality too. Warm at his throat. Questioned like a criminal. Fine hospitality surely."

"Oh!" said Morkus, mockingly. "Hospitality in your country stretches to becoming a meal for your guests. Fine hospitality that!"

"Oh no, youngster, oh no! Fawkins is a good skulkers. He would not eat such a fine, strong, handsome, kind boy."

"The salt, then, is for good luck, I suppose."

"So clever, young lord, surely. Yes, good luck. Counsel."

"ought to make your end now but I fear you have worked some doomsdark spell on my Lord. He sleep strangely and heard sturred. Wake him and I'll spare you your skin and bones."

Only the light of day can do that, youngster!" whispered the skulkers.

"You're lying, *fun thing!*" said the boy angrily. He prodded the creature's throat with the knife-point. Pawlenn wailed.

"It's dangerous, young sir, dangerous, surely."

"More so if you don't," said Morkin, prodding more firmly with the knife.

"I think, perhaps, I should try to wake him young sir," squeaked the skulkin.

With his knife-hand, Morkin waved the creature towards Lazor. Pawlenn took yet another poach from his tunic and waved it to entice wider Lazor's nose. Languidly the man opened his eyes. For a moment, Morkin's gaze left the skulkin. The skulkin bit suspiciously at the boy and, reluctantly, the boy lashed out with the skulkin clamped to his hand. The creature crashed through the thin branches that sheltered them. His jaws dropped open at the shock of impact but his flight continued, out into the forest towards a particularly prickly clump of brambles. He scrambled to his feet and raced off northwards, plucking out thorns as he ran.

"Amour!" he muttered glumly. "That's what Pawlenn needs: armour on his back. Robbin Doondark might. Don't even work on food, *fat!*"

Morkin was gently shaking Lazor.

"Lazor, my Lord, are you hurt?"

"At peace, Morkin, I was only dreaming. What's amiss?"

"A funny creature was about to make a meal of my arm before I stopped it at knife-point. It had put you under a spell, my Lord."

"Did it speak?"

"Yes, it said it was a skulkin."

"A skulkin? Then Doondark senses something. The skulkins rarely come so far south. Did you tell it anything, Morkin?"

"No my Lord, but it was speaking to you when I woke."

Lazor sat up and peered at the folds of the cloak where his head had been. A few specks of glittering dust lingered on the dark fabric.

"Sleep-frost! Morkin, did you kill it?"

Morkin shook his head.

"No, my Lord. It escaped."

"Come, we must ride! You did well enough to wake, though how you did that after sleep-frost I cannot fathom."

Lazor grasped Morkin's hand firmly. Morkin winced and Lazor felt the warmth slick of blood.

"You're hurt, Morkin."

"It's only a little, my Lord."

"A skulkin bite turned foul in hours," said the man.

"Then must I cut it open and suck-out the poison?"

Lazor laughed. "You listen to too many old-tales, Morkin. No, a few leaves of sweetfrume will close the wound. We will ride now and gather some on the way, but we must find the skulkin. If we do not, I fear Doondark may get unfairly warning that the Wbeare is awake."



CORLETH THE FEY

Upon the forest hung a sparkling frost. The air was cold and thick. If a twig snapped it would crackle for miles around but only the muted whisper of the trees could be heard. Above, the Moonstar hovered in a deep dark sky. The Moon itself was not even visible, just a deeper darkness blotting out the glistering phase of the Roads of Light.

Near the forest's strange heart lay a glade where the darkness moved strangely, dancing over the pale snow like mist in a squall. The skulkern paused at the clearing's edge, though darkness was the daylight, this was beyond heaven. Nameless fears urged him to turn and run but his muscles would not move for his eyes were themselves from the dancing shadows.

As he watched, his form seemed to drift away as though they were just lone clouds that had embraced him and were now passing into the far, far distance. The skulkern edged forwards into the glade. He felt a beautiful glowing glory shiver through him. He was completely bewitched, never, not even as a young skulking, had he been happy like this. Unaccountably, he felt good and kind and gentle.

The feeling gnawed at him like an itching tooth. In a daze, he wandered to the centre of the glade and as the shadows danced around him he peered up at the Moonstar. Its bright, needles of light pierced him with wonder. He tried but never before groped what beauty was and now the strange intoxicating experience overwhelmed him. In a gentle, lilting voice, he began to sing a song he had never heard.

The forest filled with the skulkern's feeble song. The smaller creatures of the night, bearing only the steady burn of a skulkern's however well disguised, faded to the burrows and nests. The larger creatures paused, as bewitched as the skulkern itself, and then quickly passed on their way suspecting some devious skulkern trick.

Yet there was one who heard and understood. Waking herself easily from her walking sleep Corleth the Fey turned and made her way towards the strange singer. His long, flowing slides carried him swiftly to the glade. There, at the edge of the clearing, Corleth stood and watched the tiny man, thing as it were, from the bottom of its ill-used heart.

In a soft, deep whisper Corleth added his own voice to the refrain. Then, as if prompted, a breath of wind murmured through the trees and the whole forest seemed to hum with joy.

Gradually the skulkern's song shivered to silence. The creature stared from his dream and looked around himself. The dancing shadows had gone but across the clearing lingered a tall dark figure clad in a cloak that seemed to shimmer with stars. Corleth stepped forward, laughing gently.

"Now, little skulkern, you know what it is to be a child of the earth, not just a spawn of the ice Lord."

Fawerik smiled foolishly. Not knowing what to say in reply he accompanied up to Corleth and stroked his cloak of midnight blue, gazing in wonder at tiny pinpricks of light gliding in the gaps between his fingers.

"Come, little skulkern, tell me on what reaches you are bound!"

"None, my Lord," told the skulkern automatically. Then, having said so, he suddenly regretted it. A longing to be truthful stabbed so fiercely at him that he cried out with a spasm of pain. Even so, his skulkern ways were not so easily abandoned and the next he could bring himself to say was:

"None of my own, Fey Lord."

"I need not ask whose," smiled Corleth.

The skulkern shook his head slowly from side to side.

"I have been bad, my Lord. I sprinkled sleep-dust on the Lord Lucor and found out where he was bound. And the boy who served him... well, I was hungry... even skulkerns have to eat, my Lord. He was a tasty boy anyway. He prodded my throat with his knife."

Corleth's eyes lit with sudden anger. The skulkern realised his mistake and babbled away in fearful haste.

"I only gave him a nip on the hand. I didn't eat him. He was a kind boy, a nice boy surely he was," whimpered the skulkern.

"Be at peace, little skulls," said Corleth. "To each his own way I know, in truth, you're but a tool in the hand that made you."

The skulls began to forget nervously.

"The Good One will frostily rise for sure. Hence, I thought, you knowless thoughts. Can I escape him. Make me forget, Fey Lord, surely you can make me forget!"

The skulls looked up at Corleth with wide, pleading eyes. Corleth shook his head.

"I cannot save you from the beauty of the world. I can make you forget the forest, the glade, but you have tasted the sweetness of life and that takes you beyond my powers to control. Besides, how could I bring myself to steal such a remembrance from you? Better kill you than cripple you again."

"Very kind of you, surely, but I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble," said the skulls.

Corleth laughed.

"You have a very tongue, skulls, in it may save you yet. Here, a small gift for you before I leave."

Into the skulls' silken, Corleth dropped a small amber crystal. The sphere lay in Fawkins's palm like a tiny sun, glowing with its own soft and soothing light. The skulls gazed on it and smiled; he felt it was very precious. A single tear trickled down his cheek. No one had ever given him a gift before and Fawkins was sure this was peerless amongst all gifts that had ever been given.

"Thank you, my Lord!" he gasped and tore his gaze from the jewel to look at Corleth. Corleth was already disappearing into the dark of the forest.

"Wait, my Lord, wait!" cried the skulls in.

A deep and vibrant voice called in reply. "Farewell little skulls, and begone swiftly! I suspect the wrath of the Lord Luxor will not be far behind you."

The skulls looked nervously around the glade, as if Luxor might burst out of the darkness at any moment. Then he clanked his hat tightly around the glowing heartstone and scanned to cover. Though he was fearful of his return to Uthgarak, return he must. This time, he had a glimmer of hope to comfort him: the marvellous discovery that drink was another drug in the world he cared about his fate.

Corleth did not resume his own journey but instead followed the skulls' laid trail southwards. It was a difficult path to follow if you were not a skull, and Corleth made slow progress. At length, he emerged onto a forest road. His eyes quickly scanned the width of the pathway for footprints and finding none, he smiled to himself, seated himself on a nearby tree-trunk and waited.

It was not long before the riders he expected appeared. Luxor slowed his horse to a trot and approached Corleth with his sword drawn. Corleth stood and smiled.

"What's your business, tall one?" said Luxor.

"I know a skull who shows me more courtesy than that," laughed Corleth.

Markin reined in beside Luxor and drew his sword swiftly from its scabbard.

"He must be one of Gooddark's," my Lord," heeded the boy, at what he imagined was a whisper. "Let me say him."

Corleth laughed again, a long, long, loud laugh that rolled through the night air like a gentle mist.

"You may try Markin, if you wish," said Corleth. He tugged a cord at his neck and the cloak of midnight blue fell away from him, revealing a shirt of mail so finely woven it seemed like a skin of silver. Corleth rested his hand on the hilt of his sword and waited. Markin looked astonished but nevertheless he frowned, bared his teeth in an attempt to look grim and fearsome, and urged his horse towards Corleth.

As Markin's sword scythed down, Corleth stopped lightly aside and caught the boy a wrist in his hand. Both Markin and his sword tumbled into the snow. At once, Markin scrambled towards his dropped weapon but Corleth was quicker. He took up the sword and held its point against the boy's chest.

"I will not yield," blurted out Markin, red and angry. "You must kill me first!"

"Then it seems I must yield, for I would not kill you," said Corleth. Then he reversed the sword and handed it, hilt first, to the boy.

Morkus jumped to his feet and held the sword uncertainly against Corleth's shinning shirt of mail.

"Will you give quarter, young knight?" asked Corleth with only a hint of a smile breaking on his lips.

"Only if you give your word that you will not try to escape," answered Morkus.

"Laxor, my friend, you have a bold spirit!" laughed Corleth.

"Friend?" said Morkus.

"Friend indeed!" said Laxor, striding up beside Morkus. "We fought side-by-side on the Plains of Blood in the last war against Doomsdark. I did not recognize him at first, but this is Corleth the Fey. The prisoner of yours will fetch a hefty ransom. Morkus!

Morkus dropped the point of his sword to the ground and turned towards Laxor, his face burning.

"How was it to know that?" "Would me make a fool of myself?"

Laxor placed his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"No, Morkus, Corleth was testing your spirit. It is better to know your comrade's mettle before the real battle begins, is it not?"

"And you made no fool of yourself," added Corleth, "you did what any true warrior would."

Morkus frowned and sheathed his sword. "Truly?" he asked.

"Truly," said Laxor. Morkus beamed with pleasure. He turned to Corleth.

"We fought quite well too, my Lord," he said, magnanimously. Then the man and the boy and the fey all laughed together.

Morkus lent his horse to Corleth and set a-fire Laxor as they rode north along the forest road. Laxor did not wish to lose more time than necessary, so did not mention the matter of the skulls until they were on their way. When he did relate the tale, Corleth remained silent until Laxor had finished. Then, at last, he spoke.

"I met the skulls once in our past," said Corleth.

"Why did you not say?" asked Laxor incredulously. "We must find it and silence it."

"All peace, my friend, you must give some quarter even to skulls. Are they not creatures of flesh and blood? His only crime is knowledge and you cannot slay him for that alone. Who knows? Perhaps he will not tell Doomsdark of his knowledge."

"Perhaps snow is not cold," said Laxor bitterly.

"Perhaps it is not," said Corleth. "Would you believe that I found the skulls in a glade of shadows, singing his heart out to the Moonbeams? Would you believe that he told me truly of his death this night? Would you believe that when I made him a gift of a heartstone, a tear rolled down his cheek?"

"If only but you had told me, I would not," said Laxor.

"Then believe me when I say we must let him live and find his own destiny. If we do not, why are we fighting Doomsdark?"

"Yes, you are right, my friend," said Laxor wearily. Then he added darkly, "The cold wears me down."

"Your heart is strong enough. Believe that too," smiled Corleth.

Laxor fell silent, remembering earlier days when they had ridden together across the lands of Midnight with cars that seemed as light as falling snow. He hoped his heart was strong enough. Then hearing the gentle snoring of Morkus asleep before him, Laxor seemed to hear all the progress of the Moonbeams in his heart while Doomsdark was dangerously gathered about them and knew he must be strong. He shrugged the sadness from him and rode on towards the Tower of the Moon a little more gladly.



THE TOWER OF THE MOON

Dawn approached swiftly, raining swift fingers of light over the lands of Midnight. Far to the east it touched the grim Kept of Utarg with a brief golden haze. The Bargemasters yawned and looked around only to see if the next watch approached to relieve them. The dawn moved on, breasting over the Dunes of Atsom, cloaking them in comfort and softness. The hills which had seemed fanged heads of evil-smiling creatures in the absence of light, seemed now to draw apart and unfold.

The daylight spread farther westwards, painting the Plains of Dawn-dust crimson, then amber, then a deep glowing yellow so that they looked, for a fleeting moment, as they did in any noon of the Long Summer, clad in wheaten gold. In lonely hearths scattered across the broad plains, villagers stirred and awoke to see the warmth of daylight return, then bent themselves to their daily tasks.

Over the Forest of Thral the hand of the Sun, shooting bright arrows of light into the sepulchral darkness of the trees, and then further west to cross the steeper walls and tall towers of the Citadel of Shemera. As the first blaze of sunlight fell into the Courtyard of the Flags, the great horn sang out over the city. Twelve times the great horn followed its simple flares. A short, deep boom followed by a longer, more resonant note. A-wook! a-wook! it sang and then fell silent. The city roused itself steadily with creakings of shutters, rattling of doors and the growing murmur of foot on its cobble streets.

The dawn did not linger but hurried on its endless journey ever westward, ever westward till the world ceased to spin. Across the Plains of Blood it shed its own, brighter blood. When men moved there, clutched in reluctant remembrance, indeed not pause to gaze upon the colours of the sunrise. Then, at last, the light grazed the edges of the Forest of Shadows, rose up and flew over a sea of mist, wrapped trees to touch the high Skandas of the Tower of the Moon.

From its crowning dome of Looking-Crystal, Rorthron was watching. Through the mists of the forest, he saw a wind of light blow away the darkness and speed toward them over the leagues and leagues of trees. And though he would not have dared to count how many days he had watched from his solitary post, he smiled as he always did when the sun rose in full glory over the green rim of the forest.

Rorthron turned and looked to the west where the light still advanced inexorably upon the darkening of trees. He sighed. Such a brief summer this damned Sun brought each day. He had been not much more than a boy at the height of the Long Summer. Then, the great disk of the Sun seemed to fill the sky; a day seemed to stretch forever as the longest hour glided by and people sought cool shade, not crackling fires. It did not seem ten thousand years ago.

Rorthron shook his head as if to deny that the Long Summer had ever existed. He roused himself from his memories and set his gaze beyond the horizon. He looked first to the north, to Utargark, the eye of his mind not seeing pictures but instead absorbing a crowd of thoughts that disturbed in the far, far distance.

There was much commotion in the great Citadel. Men and fowler creatures were preparing themselves for war. The captains of Doomedark were tallying supplies, marshalling their war-bands, bustling to and fro in the Winter Palace with last-minute orders and requisitions. Their thoughts were only of victory; already they were exultant at the havoc they would wreak, the vast slaughter that lay in their command.

The lesser minions of the Wrothking were less sanguine. Though they too had no doubt of the final victory, they knew equally that they might not be granted the privilege of enjoying it. Some that their lives were the misuse of war to be spent warily as their cold master desired. Some were filled with disgust at themselves that their weakness and avarice had brought them to this, fighting in the service of the loathsome Doomedark. Others, more pragmatic, simply counted themselves lucky that they, at least, had a chance to survive whilst the enemies of the Cold One most certainly did not. And there were some, of course, who despite their fears for their own wretched lives took comfort in the knowledge that soon they would be reaping a rich harvest of death and pain across the battlefields of Midnight and nourished their uncertain courage with kind visions of rape and pillage.

Rorithron turned away. He had seen nothing he had not expected to see, yet still it filled him with infinite sadness to see the people and creatures of Midnight used thus. The Wise had failed. So long ago, in the very dawn of the world, his race had been charged with its guardianship. Now their complacently had allowed this to happen and all they could bring themselves to do was to lock themselves securely in their towers and choose to forget that the world still existed beyond the high stones.

At length, Rorithron turned his mind-gaze south-east to Corlay and the Citadel of Agorish. Here was a different connection: children playing in the streets, waggons clogging their horses, market-sellers calling out to busy customers, inn-keepers pouring the first ale of the morning into great jugs, blacksmiths stoking their forges. The city was at peace, its people content. And there were vigour-forgers for the future stoking in the depths of new suns: they were forgotten in the brightness of morning, each dawn a new hope, a new beginning.

One day from the Solstice, Corlay still had an air of summer about it. This sadness lifted a little from Rorithron's thoughts. While Corlay was fine, there was still hope and goodness in the world and he must bend all his powers to preserve it. Rorithron walked briskly to the stairway and descended from his tower to greet the riders approaching out of the Forest of Shadows.

Luxor, Corleth and Marlan were greeted warmly by Rorithron. They bathed first after their long journey and then joined Rorithron to break fast in the High Hall. A blazing fire was burning in the great stone fireplace and they sat before it with Rorithron to eat and drink. There were many tales to be told but as the day grew older, Luxor turned to more serious matters.

"When does the Council begin, Rorithron? Surely, there is much to discuss."

"My friend, it has already begun. I am guilty of a little deceit, no others of the Wise will do themselves. They think I am a foolish old man with a hopeless dream and will leave me apart in the coming war against Doomdark. They wait for better times, as if better times will appear by magic out of nowhere," said Rorithron wearily.

"That cannot be so!" cried Luxor, agitated.

"It is so, my friend, I am the Last Council of the Wise."

Corleth laughed. "Then at least we can hope for unanimous decisions. Besides, one of you Rorithron, is worth a dozen of the rest. We should not be troubled when the hopeless desert us."

Rorithron smiled gratefully. Luxor nodded his reluctant acceptance of the truth and their talk turned to Midnight and the realms of the Free. In the east, the Targ still preserved a fiery independence. The Uurg of Uurg would suffer none to cross his lands. Free or Fey or Foul and though the Witchking was known to have sent emissaries to him, only one ambassador had been returned, flayed alive. To the north of the Plains of Targ, Kurnier had not been invaded for many moons. On his northern borders, the Forest of Whispers had swallowed nearly a doornish-year-land and to the west the Marshal of Kurnier kept a strong watch on the Mountains of Ithril.

West of the Targ, Maraketh remained free, though war-bands had been spotted on the western plains scurrying for the cover of the Forest of Thrali. Further west, the Plains of Blood had become a dangerous place for the lonely traveller, though still passable by a strong troop. The Marshal of Shienar sent frequent raiding parties north into the plains. Many of the Foul had been slain but with each passing day their strength grew and the Gap of Valentin could no longer be reached without an army to clear the way.

Around the Forest of Shadows itself, there was little to be seen of Men, Foul or Free, yet further south on the Plains of Gard, Doomdark kept a strong raiding band that had even ventured to the walls of the Citadel of Gard. Of all the lands of Midnight, only Corlay remained untouched by Doomdark's cold hand.

None of them doubted that Doomdark would deploy his main strength on the plains of Valentin in his next attempt to force a passage south across the Plains of Blood. To the east the Mountains of Ithril were too formidable a barrier for the numberless armies of the Witchking to be supplied across, let alone to march across. To the west, the bleak passage between the Mountains of Aethlar and Gador was too narrow a road for him to take.

But could they hold Doomdark this time on the Plains of Blood, as they had done so many times before? If not, Doomdark could choose from many roads after gaining the Plains: he could strike out at his leisure in any direction and the armies of the Free would be caught running to one breach after another. Luxor was not hopeful.

"Doomdark is too strong. How can we hope to hold him now on the Plains of Blood when we so barely succeeded the last time?"

Perhaps we should not try "soulCorseth." If we let him move his hands onto the Plains of Blood and further south if necessary, that would leave the way open for us to strike at Lohngarik itself.

"To do that, we would need to pass through the Cup of Vilethor ourselves," "shellLuxor." "We could not do that with Doomdark camped on the Plains."

"Have you forgotten Ithron, my friend? Is not the Citadel of Ithron still free?" asked Corseth.

"Tenuously so," said Rorthorn. "The Marshal of Ithron is barely pressed."

From Ithron we could strike north without the Mountains of Thrill to block our way, then turn west at Underhinge and approach Lohngarik by its back door.

And what of Markon and Shendal and Corley? Am we to leave them defenceless on the face of Doomdark, what we risk off on a hopeless sortie? No, Corseth, I will not do that," shouted Luxor.

Is it any less hopeful that defending the Plains of Blood? Either way, all may be lost, but if we should take Lohngarik, Doomdark would be finished."

"At what price?" asked Luxor, eagerly.

Rorthorn got to his feet and stood before them.

"At peace, my friends. All ways are perilous but we must not exclude any if we are to defeat Doomdark. His greatest weapons are fear and confusion. We must not think that any task is hopeless – and I cannot! Less Doomdark was once fed and blood. Now he is more sound, wiser, how much easier should it be to defeat him?" said Rorthorn, smiling broadly.

Luxor was still better. "I know you are not joking yet, Rorthorn. If your words are meant to comfort us, they are ill chosen."

"Perhaps you need more than words," said Rorthorn calmly. He reached out his hand towards Luxor and opened it out, palm upwards. "Perhaps you need this."

There, in the palm of the Wise, lay a ring of red gold into which was set a single jewel, as round and smooth as a pearl but of a clear sparkling blue that flashed a red flickered like lightning.

"I have rings already, Rorthorn."

"Not one like that, my friend," laughed Corseth. Luxor looked curiously at Corseth, wondering what joke this could possibly be.

"I never thought I could. It is a wonder so Man or Fay has seen it in our lifetimes. Luxor, this is the Moon Ring, the last of the Great War Rings of Midnight!"

Luxor turned his gaze again to Rorthorn's palm and looked in wonder at the legendary ring that lay there. The marks of despair that had clung to his thoughts for many moons seemed to clear and fade away as he watched. Beside him, Markon was crouching low, back so far forward to get a better view that he almost fell off his seat. Luxor looked up at Rorthorn.

"You know I cannot take that, Rorthorn. It is not my right."

"Forgive me, Luxor," said Rorthorn. "I have kept this from you too long, but with good reason. You are not simply Lord Luxor of the Free, you are the last heir of the House of the Moon. You, my Lord Luxor, are the Moonpriests and this ring is yours by right, to be worn only in circumstances of greatest peril. Once slipped on your finger, it cannot be removed until you are dead or the peril has passed. It will give you the Power of Command and the Power of Vision over those lands and subjects loyal to you, even at great distances. With the Power of Vision you will be able to see through their eyes what they see. With the Power of Command you will be able to urge them to undertake any task they would willingly perform for you. And more than this, it will echo the wormthund strength of your mainland and forth a tide of hope across the sea-lands of Midnight. It is yours. Take it, and ease it with care."

Rorthorn the Wise stepped forward and dropped the Moon Ring into Luxor's hand. Luxor was quite speechless for a while. Then, at length, he spoke.

"Thank you, Rorthorn the Wise, this is a gift beyond gifts. Yet, I do not understand why you have kept all this from me so long. Surely in the last war against Doomdark, this ring would have been a help beyond price?"

"Yes, Luxor, it surely would but the Wise have their reasons. The Solstice is the peak of Doomdark's power. Defeat him before that and he will return as surely as the snow will fall. Defeat him at the peak of his power and he will never return, never blight the lands of Midnight again with his foul schemes. Nor could I tell any of your true anxiety for fear that Doomdark would gain

the knowledge too and hurt you down like vermin. Does now he respects nothing and when the morning comes, the Sabbath itself, he will expect all its glory for himself. From Ushgankh will issue forth an ice-fear like the like of which has never been seen, rolling its terror across midnight like a plague. Tomorrow, at dawn, you must don the Moon Ring and send a blaze of hope-winged across the land, meeting his ice-fear, stabbing him with hope that a seventh still exists that can resist him and filling him with doubt. Then you must ride swiftly to Corlay and rally all the peoples of the Froo to your banner. You must challenge Doomdark everywhere: leave one pathway unguarded and think openwide flood will pour through. The Moon Ring itself will lend you the power to guide the forces of the Froo and under your guidance they will march against Doomdark as one. The Captains of Cold will be blind compared to those whose way is lit by the War Ring of the House of the Moon.

"And a plan?" asked Luxor. "Are we not to have a battle-plan?"

Corleth graced Luxor's ears firmly.

"Of course, Luxor," he said, "But don't you see? This time, this war the Moon Ring lends us the power to change our plans at a moment's notice. No longer must we stake all upon a single throw."

"Yes, of course," mused Luxor, still dazed at his new-found inheritance.

"There is one matter we have not yet considered," said Rorthoon, a note of warning thrumming in his voice.

"What is that, Wise One?" prompted Corleth.

"The Ice Crown."

Even Corleth seemed to pale at its mention. Morion tugged gently at Luxor's sleeve and whispered a question to him. Rorthoon smiled and turned to the dog.

Fashioned of the purest, coldest crystals of ice, forged in the Frozen Wastes on the bleakest of nights by Doomdark himself, the Ice Crown is the source of all his power. For enable him to suck from the heart of the Winter all the better forces of cold and embed them to his will. He keeps it in the Tower of Doom, north of Ushgankh across the Plains of Deeper. Few have seen it and few yet all have felt its better touch.

"Do you think we could seize it?" asked Luxor. How hope had dawned in him now and he could almost begin to believe that even such a desperate folly as this might succeed.

"I think we must try," said Rorthoon, "If we succeed in seizing it, Doomdark's power will be shattered. Even if we fail, the attempt will distract him and thus help our armies to prevail."

"We cannot spare more than a few for such a perilous task," said Luxor.

"No, indeed. And no more than one for the first journey to the Tower of Doom, one who can resist those fears that stream from it as sunlight streams from the sun. It is your choice, Morgance."

"I cannot lay such a task on another's shoulders. I must go myself."

Smiling said, said Rorthoon. "But that cannot be: the Moon Ring throws forth mind-warmth — that bids born and reborn. Doomdark would sense your presence before you got within fifty leagues of the Ice Crown. You must choose another. I would go myself but the Wise have too much knowledge of each other, I could not hide myself from Doomdark any more than he can hide himself from me."

"Then there is only Corleth," said Luxor reluctantly. "No other than he can resist the ice-fear at its coldest, no other that I know of."

Luxor turned to Corleth. The Foy looked troubled. He turned his eyes away from Luxor then rose silently and wandered towards the colonnade that ended the High Hall. He stopped by a slender column and gazed out through the Looking Crystal over the Forest of Shadows. The others remained silent, waiting for him to decide. After a long while, Corleth returned and stood before them all in front of the great fire. His eyes were heavy and his face drawn.

"There is another," he said. "One stronger than I could ever be in the face of the ice-fear."

"Then who?" asked Luxor, puzzled and frustrated by the riddles of the Foy.

"If I could keep this from you, my friend Luxor, I would. But in truth I cannot. The old song says that one will be born, half Foy, half human, whom the ice-fear cannot touch, surrounded with the laughter and ignorance of the Foy and the wild fire of Men, the ice-fear will roll from him like drops of rain in a summer shower."

Corleth passed and his eyes glazed over as he tried to imagine what such a summer, what such

a shower would be like. Then he blinked and forced himself to continue.

My Lord, my friend, Luxor, Moonprince — he stole away your!

The Feylord's head emerged at the floor; he could not bring himself to look Luxor in the eye. The silence was profound.

Ma? whispered Morkan. How can it be his?

Corleth lifted his head and turned his deep eyes towards the boy.

"Tell me what you know of your father and mother, Morkan," said the Fey gently. The boy looked startled.

I know nothing, my Lord. I was only a babe when my Lord Luxor found me, while hunting deer in the Forest of Tharmath. He gathered me up and took me home and cared for me, as he has cared for me ever since; he has been like a father to me all my life.

Corleth smiled and looked up towards the distant ceiling of the High Hall.

It was many moons ago, he said. We had pressed over the foul hands of Doodenark on the Plains of Blood, but the price was heavy. Many were slain, many were shattered and led by the last throes of fear to recent agonies. After the battle, a host of our faithful warriors were killed and demised across the bloody fields, their hearts empty, their minds full of horror. There were so many that those who had survived unscathed could not hope to find them all before they took their own path to peace or simply wasted away in the next better night.

Such a mass, wounded to the quick in body and mind, found his way into the depths of the Forest of Tharm. It was there, exhausted and close to death, that one of the Fey, the fair Aleasha, found him. She dragged him over a tangle of branches to her tree-home and there she nursed him to health again. As his strength grew, so did his enchantment with Aleasha and so did her enchantment with him.

When he was fully strong again, his mind healed by her comfort and words of peace, his body mended by her subtle, Feyish skills, they made their love complete. Yet Aleasha was troubled. She knew their love, however strong, could not last, for he was a mortal man and she a Fey. She did nothing to him but let the day-and nights of their love linger on until she could bear it no longer. Then, gathering all her courage, she freed his mind of every memory of her, not wishing him to bear the pain of their impossible love. She led him to the southern edge of the Forest of Tharm and watched him, devoid of it to the distance as he walked out across the Plains of Ierenth towards the Mountains of Morning and his distant home.

Some months later Aleasha bore a child, a rare child, his child as well as hers. Her delight almost overwhelmed the pain of parting but even in the moment of joy she thought only of him. Out of love had she made him forget yet she knew she would not forget her own memories, however painful. She was determined that he too should reap something of the harvest of their love. And so, twenty or more later, she journeyed south with her babe across Ierenth and Haroth to the borders of Conrany.

How many times had he told her of hunts he rode in the Forest of Tharmath, how many times had he pictured in her mind its winding paths and gentle glades. She knew where he would be. As



down approached, she listened for the hoofbeats of his horse and when she heard none, she bundled the babe in white furs and fled him by the path. She dared not linger for fear that she would cry out as he approached and run to his arms. So, with a parting kiss for her child, she turned back to the north, eager to see him sooner her lover again.

"That son was you, Morkin. Your father is my friend, Luser."

Rorthron the Wise sniffed loudly and dabbed at his eyes with the long sleeves of his gown. Luser for the second time that morning, was dumbfounded. But Morkin, beaming with joy, leapt to his feet and flung his arms around the Moonprince.

"You always have been and now it is true," he said. In some confusion, Luser smiled and returned this son's embrace.

"It is all I could wish, Morkin," he said, then added, "Save that all secrets were as happy as this when revealed — and revealed sooner."

Suddenly Morkin whirled round on Corieth.

"Yes? Why did you keep the secret from — from my father? You are his friend."

And you're too, Morkin. The Fey have long suspected that the House of the Moon still survived. The Wise let not the only guardians of knowledge. I could not be sure until today when Rorthron held forth the Moon Ring, but since I have known him, I have harboured a secret hope that your father was the Moonprince. I did know, as Rorthron told, that Doomsdark suspected nothing. To have revealed your kinship would have placed you both in double jeopardy as it does even now. My words may yet be your death, Morkin. I pray you will forgive me. These are dark times.

Morkin looked subdued.

"I suppose you did right, my Lord Corieth. It is I who should be sorry, not you," he said, grudgingly. "I hate Doomsdark. He spoils everything."

He does indeed, Morkin, my well named son, said Luser. Corieth the Fey, you have given me a hard choice. How can I send a boy even if he is my own son, on such a perilous quest? He may be able to scorn these fears — that I can well believe — but there are many other dangers on the road to the Tower of Doom.

It was Morkin who answered first.

"You must send me, Father. If you do not, Midnight might be lost anyway and then what would become of me?"

"The boy is right," said Rorthron. "We must take every chance. It has come to that."

Luser nodded slowly. He clasped Morkin's hand.

"If you wish it, Morkin, seek the Ice Crown and attempt its destruction. I will not send you, but you may go if you wish."

There was fire in the boy's words and a gladness shining in his eyes.

"Of course I will go, Father! Can I wish me back to Doomsdark who will need it?"



THE SOLSTICE

It was strange down. The Sun seemed reluctant to shake-off the shackles of night and soar over the rim of the world. When it did, the rays it sent spinning across Midnight seemed cold and paled. From the north a frozen mist was sweeping over the hills and forests and plains and the dawns were silent, the air empty of birds. The earth introduced by the chattering creatures of day. Even to Corley the coldness spread and a nameless chill gripped men's hearts as they rose to greet the new day. Old warriors, in dread, whispered of Doomsday, for they had been touched like this before, but the mist simply shivered and slid, with small voices, to shrug off their unthinking fear.

This was only the vanguard of the ice-fear that gathered in the north. Around Ushgark, the mist was so thick and high that the city still lay in darkness. Though the mist of Midnight was bled in light, then, like a storm driven by the bled of the tall sky, the great mist began to roll south over the Plains of Despair. Even Doomsday's creatures quailed and shivered as it passed. The mist turned out as it moved ever southwards but it did not seem to thin or diminish, rather, it grew thicker and taller as it devoured the waking landscape.

From the Tower of the Moon, Luvor the Moonprince rode out to meet the dawns. At one side of him rode Markin, his face eager and staring with the fire the dawns seemed to lack. At the other side rode Corley the Fey, a host of unbroken laughter playing round his lips. Luvor turned first to Corley.

"My friend, we must part now but I will be with you. I know your people are loathe to fight but this is more than a war of Men. Ride north to the forests of the Fey and gather those you call to our banner; we will have need of you and all your kin before this war is done."

"The Fey will fight, my Lord Moonprince. Though it be so you may not notice how I will ride more than a war-band. I promise you. Fare thee well, my friend."

Then the Moonprince turned to his son. He placed his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"This parting has come too soon. I fear your task may be the hardest of all. Markin, take no risk without need. You risk enough already."

"Have no fear, Father. I will return. The risk more than I and it is I who should take care to do not or please me again."

Luvor smiled.

"I will try not to. Farewell, my son."

The Moonprince turned to the south, east, towards Corley. He took the Moon Ring and slipped it on his finger. In his mind, the distant murmur of battle seemed to grow and a warm fire burned in his blood. Suddenly the horizon seemed to expand and fly away into the distance as into his mind flooded all the hopes and fears of the peoples of the Free. He drew his sword from its scabbard and held it aloft; then spurred his white stallion towards the Forest of Shadows and toward Corley.

"Arise, Midnight!" he called as he rode. "Arise the Free! For and down to at our gates. Waken your valour, arm yourselves with courage! We ride to conquer Doomsday, forever! Arise, Midnight, arise!"

His war-cry rising out across the still dawns, flying over the forests and hills, whistling over the plains, in the distant plaid of the free wilderness, in Markin's, in Shemar's, in Kianur and in Card and in Kojokoth, then paused and looked about themselves, wondering they heard a faint echo whose words they could not quite catch yet which quickened their hearts and made their blood race.

Then an arrow swept away by a sudden wind, though the air stayed as still as the mountains, the dawn mist that lay over Midnight vanished northwards, striding back toward Ushgark. The full dawn broke suddenly over the land, showering it in a blaze of warmth and light. A wave of hope rippled outwards from the Forest of Shadows across the country of the Free, to fire Corley, to the Plains of Dawn, to the Mountains of Morning, warming all hearts and bringing a glimmer of gladness to Midnight that had too long been absent.

In the Winter Palace of Uthgarok, the frozen mist that should have been flowing out as an endless stream was rushing back in. Doomsdair flailed his arms through it and thickened about him.

Back! he cried. Back! Fly out, out!

It was too no avail. The ice-fear rushed homewards and sank back into his cold flesh. When all had ebbed and the air cleared, there was worse; a warmth, an inexplicable warmth seemed to touch his mind. The Witchking grimaced. He had almost forgotten what pain was like. A spout of doubt buried itself in his thoughts and like a canker, began to grow.

A Moonprince? he mused. Not if it can be!

But far to the south, already Luth the Moonprince sped through the Forest of Shadows to rally Corelay and the Free. The War of the Sakers had begun.



THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

GUIDE TO PLAY

Loading instructions

To **LOAD** the Lords of Midnight, press the **SHIFT** key and **RUN/STOP** key. The game will then **LOAD** and **RUN**.

Starting off

The Lords of Midnight has a facility which enables you to **SAVE** the game you are playing at any stage. When loading a complete screen will appear depicting the stature of Lusa the Moonprince and your quest will begin on the day of the Solstice itself.

If you press **F1** a screen will appear instructing you to **LOAD** the saved data of the game you wish to continue. Once the data has been loaded back into your Commodore, the last screen of the game you saved will appear and you can continue your quest.

Saving a game in progress

The data for the Lords of Midnight can be saved at any stage of the game. To save a game in progress, you must first press the **F3** key. This should **only** be pressed at a time when the computer is waiting for you to press an option key. If it is doing something else, it will merely ignore your key- stroke.

When you press **F3** a screen will appear instructing you what to do next.

Abandoning a game

We hope that you will never need to abandon a game of Midnight but if it should come to pass that your situation is beyond all hope, you can abandon the game by pressing the **RUN/STOP** and **RESTORE** keys.

Keeping track of things

Because such a lot is always going on in the land of Midnight, we have provided a facility whereby you can keep a printed record of each game as it progresses. Of course, you will need a printer compatible with the Spectrum and you may need a lot of paper! Pressing the **COPY** key at any stage of the game will print out the screen in front of you. If you use this facility to its full, you should end up with an illustrated history of the War of the Solstice.

The role you play

You, the player, take the role of Lusa the Moonprince, Lord of the Free. By virtue of the Moon Ring, which lends you the Power of Vision and the Power of Command, you can control other characters that are loyal to you, move them through the landscapes of Midnight and look through their eyes. Some of these characters are simply individuals, others are commanders at the head of whole armies, when you move a commander, his army moves with him.



The computer plays the part of Doomsdark, the Witchking of Midnight and controls the characters and armies loyal to him. In addition, the computer also governs the actions of the independent characters and forces in the land of Midnight.

A choice of games

There are two distinct ways of winning a victory over Doomsdark. The first is by war, by sending armies north to the Plains of Despair and seizing the Citadel of Uthgarok from whence Doomsdark commands his evil hordes. In such a strategy, Luser himself will play a major part as a commander in the field.

The second way of winning is by quest, by guiding Morkan, Luser's son, to the Tower of Doom to destroy the Ice Crown, the source of Doomsdark's power. Morkan can have no time to help him on his journey for the Ice Crown sends forth the ice-fear which withers men's minds. By virtue of his birth, half-human, half-icy only Morkan can resist the utter coldness of the Ice Crown's power.

If you prefer a pure adventure, just concentrate on the quest of Morkan. The armies of Doomsdark will still march south to conquer Midnight but the armies of Uthgarok will defend themselves without your guidance, even though they will not make any counter moves.

If you prefer a pure war game, ignore the quest of Morkan and concentrate on the assault of Uthgarok.

To play the complete epic, however, you should place equal importance on the war that Luser directs and the quest that Morkan journeys on. Naturally enough, the complete epic takes the longest copy of the other options, you will find the quest the quicker game.

There are no keys to press to choose which sort of game you play — you simply choose move-by-move, which characters you want to guide. At any stage, you can enter the balance sheet, abandon the quest, and take up war or admit defeat on the battlefield and turn to seek the Ice Crown.

If you want to play the Lords of Midnight with your family or friends, we suggest that each player assign control over a particular character or group of characters, and that you play as a team against the evil Doomsdark.

Victory for Doomsdark

To win, Doomsdark (or the computer, if you prefer) must achieve two objectives. First, he must dominate Morkan, as long as Morkan wishes the game will continue. Second, he must subdue the armies of the Free. This can be done in two ways, either by eliminating Luser the Moonprince who is their commander or by taking the Citadel of Argonath in the land of Garney, the home of all their hopes.

If Luser is killed, you, the player, lose all control over the other characters in the game except for Morkan, his son. If, by any chance, Morkan manages to find the Moon Ring that Luser wore and which was the source of Luser's Powers of Vision and Command, he can put it on and you will regain control over those characters still loyal to the Free. However, once he does this, Morkan will immediately become known to Doomsdark and his quest to stop the Ice Crown will become almost impossible.

If Argonath is taken by Doomsdark, but Morkan is still alive, Luser can continue the armed struggle against the Witchking. For Doomsdark to win, Argonath must be Doomsdark's and Morkan must be dead, OR both Luser and Morkan must be dead.

The Ice-Fear and the Moon Ring

The ice-fear is Doomsdark's greatest weapon, sapping men's courage and reducing armies to rubble. If strong enough, it may even cause characters once loyal to Luser and the Free to desert to Doomsdark's side. He can use it either as a general effect, spread equally over the lands of Midnight, or concentrate it in particular places.

The only shield against it is the Moon Ring that Luser wears. It augments the strength and warmth of his mind. The closer a character of army to Luser, the less will be the demoralising effect of the ice-fear. The same applies if Morkan is the wearer of the Moon Ring. There is one drawback, the Witchking can see the warmth of the Moon Ring and so at any stage of the game, he knows the precise whereabouts of its wearer.

The strength of the ice-fear also depends on Doomsdark's confidence. As the Witchking takes Citadel after Citadel of the Free so does the ice-fear grow but when he suffers defeat or doubt, the ice-fear dwindles. The Ice Crown has a cold intelligence of its own and as Morkan comes closer

towards it, it will feel the approaching danger and bend a greater and greater part of its force towards its own protection. So as Morien approaches the Ice Crown, more and more of the ice-ber will be directed at him alone but it will not affect him. Instead, the burden of its armor will begin to lift from the knees and commanders of the Free.

Controlling a character

As stated in the introduction, the Lords of Midnight is not a standard adventure game and controlling the characters does not require you to guess at the right phrase or command. Instead, you have four basic options, each available at the press of a single key —

1) Look ← (Backspace arrow)

On screen will appear a landscape corresponding to the view that the character sees in the direction he is looking at the time. There are some always appearing lines of text giving details of where he stands as well as a tactical shield which describes him. During the LOOK option you can turn the character to look in another direction by pressing one of the compass keys.

These correspond to the eight points of the compass and are numbered 1-8 on the keyboard: 1) North, 2) North-east, 3) East, 4) South-east, 5) South, 6) South-west, 7) West, 8) North-west.

2) Move (Spacebar)

The character will move forward in the same direction he was last looking. When he reaches his next location, he will continue looking in that direction and the LOOK option will reappear with a new landscape.

3) Think (Return key)

When the character is told to THINK, the screen becomes largely text and you are given more details regarding the character, any army he controls and the place he is in. This could be included in the short end of the LOOK screen.

4) Choose (Restore key)

The CHOOSE screen presents you with a list of special options, not covered by the basic LOOK and MOVE options. It also lists the city you must price for each of these options.

What special options are open will depend upon the situation the character finds himself in but will include such choices as searching, hiding, attacking an enemy, repairing defenses and so on.

The CHOOSE screen will also reflect the personality of the particular character. All the choices you are presented with are only those the character would be likely to choose by himself. So, the choices open to a cowardly character will seldom include brave deeds, the choices open to a greedy character will seldom include acts of generosity.

You can press the LOOK, MOVE, THINK and CHOOSE keys at any stage during any of the four basic options and the new screen will appear at once.

Selecting a character

At the beginning of the game, you have four characters under your control. These can all be selected by using the four function keys. Luser the Moon Prince is F1, Morien hero is F2, Corlath the Fey is F3 and Rathan the Wise is F4.

When any of these is selected, the display will switch immediately to the LOOK option for that character.

To select other characters (which you must recruit to your cause during the course of the game) you must press the SELECT key. When you do this a list of other characters you control will appear together with a list of the keys to select them. Press one of these selection keys and the display will switch immediately to the LOOK option for that character.

Once you have selected a character, your control will remain with that character until you select another. Selection can be undertaken at any stage of the LOOK, MOVE, THINK and CHOOSE options.

How the game works

The game begins on the day of the Winter Solstice. Initially, you control Luxor the Moonprince, Morika, Corbett the Fey and Rortin the Wise. These characters start the game at the Tower of the Moon in the Forest of Shadows. The game proceeds by day and by night.

During the day, you can move any or all of the characters you control and any armies that are with them. The distance a character can move in one day depends on the difficulty of the terrain and whether he is walking or riding as well as his state of health. You must learn by experience precisely how far you can travel under given circumstances. However, there is one important thing to remember: when you travel directly north, south, east or west you are moving just one league at a time. When you move north-east, north-west, south-east or south-west you are moving along the diagonal at a square consequence by one league a distance of approximately 1.4 leagues. Therefore, this will take you longer and take less hours of daylight for the rest of your journey.

When a character has exhausted his hours of daylight, night will fall for him, and, unless there are exceptional circumstances (the THINK screen will tell you if there are), he will not be able to do any more until the following day. You can still, however, move other characters under your control.

Once you have moved all the characters you wish to you must press the MOVE if (corro) key. This lets night fall everywhere and signals the start of activities for the forces of Doomdark. During the night, Doomdark will move his characters and armies across Midnight and there will be a pause as he "thinks". Soon, however, a new day will dawn and you can command your characters afresh.

DO NOT FORGET TO PRESS THE NIGHT (N) KEY WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED YOUR DAY'S MOVEMENT. IF YOU DO NOT PRESS IT NOTHING FURTHER WILL HAPPEN AT ALL.

The Sun

A character will see the sun when looking in the appropriate direction at the right time of day (East in the morning, west in the evening). This can be a useful aid to play in seeing how many hours remain to that character in a particular day.

Engaging in battle

Minor skirmishes involving individual characters and small war-bands are quick affairs and can take place at any stage throughout the day. Battles between armies, however, that will not be decided until the day moves.

Because a battle between armies is such a major event, you will not be able to move an army to the same location as an enemy army by using the simple MOVE option. Such a move is always one of the special actions you can opt for during the CHOOSE option. Some of the commanders you control may be so afraid that the choice to move them into battle does not even appear as one of the possibilities.

During the course of the day you can move as many armies into battle as you wish. If you move more than one army into the same battle, the program will keep track of their times of arrival (which may influence the outcome of the contest). However, once an army or a character has been moved into a battle, it will not be able to move again until the following day.

At dawn on the following day, the outcome will be known to your commanders. If the enemy has lost, his armies will have been destroyed in the night or have fled, leaving your armies and characters free to move. If the enemy has not lost, you have the choice of retreating with what is left of your armies or continuing the struggle for another day, possibly throwing in more forces. If, however, the enemy has won a decisive victory, when dawn breaks you will find your armies destroyed and your surviving commanders scattered. The enemy forces may have advanced far beyond the battlefield.

Many things will influence the outcome of a battle: the number of troops, the type of terrain, the quality of the commanders and, of course, the strength of the ice-fear. But, as any warrior must, you must learn by experience.

The map of Midnight

The map of Midnight (see back) reproduced in this booklet depicts the major features of the geography of Midnight, but like any map it does not show every single detail. You will find surprises whenever you roam. It will serve well, however, as a guide to your journeys through Midnight and, also, a good helper when you become lost. But do not forget that the landscape has its own secrets.

The free and the foul

On the day of the Solstice, at the start of the gurne, Doomsdark's forces hold the north whilst the Free hold the South. Few of Doomsdark's armies will be found south of the Mountains of Ithril and the Plains of Midnigh. Of the major citadels, Doomsdark holds Ustgorsk, Goring, Worgath and For. The only armies of the Free to be found north of the Mountains of Ithril and the Plains of Midnigh are in Ithron and the Plains of Ithril. Of the major citadels, the Free still hold Ithron, Kurnar, Maraleth, Sharnai, Gard and Aggorieth. In the east, the barbarian tribes of the Tang remain independent of both Doomsdark and the Moorsprace. In the west, save for the Citadel of Gard, the lands are mostly empty and under no one's sway.

The Fey are at loose alliance with the Free. They do not seek war but neither do they relish the thought of Doomsdark overrunning Midnigh. Their part in the War of the Solstice will be mostly passive. Their homes are the forests of Midnigh and Doomsdark's armies will not willingly be allowed passage through these. Certainly the Fey however, should be able to rally enough of his people to his banner to form an army.

The Wise have isolated themselves from the world and live like hermits in their tall towers. Doomsdark will not bother them so long as they remain withdrawn from the affairs of Iles and most certainly they will not aid him. In the right circumstances it may be possible to seek their help and be granted it. Rortaron the Wise could prove a useful ally in this.

The Utarg of Utarg may be persuaded to bring the Tang into the war against Doomsdark, especially if the armies of the Woldung are tempted or forced to trespass on his lands. If the ice-fear grows too strong however, he may lend his loyalty to Doomsdark.

Of the Free themselves, there are many Lords. Lucor should first set himself the task of seeking their loyalty thus gaining control of many armies. Most powerful are the Lord Marshals of the great Citadel but the Moorsprace will find other Lords who will ally to his command. He should not, however, waste too much time seeking out allies, there are others who will make fine ambassadors.





Looking around

During your travels through Midnight, you will see many different scenes. This is a traveler's guide to some of the things you will see. All of these features of Midnight's geography rely upon cover to an army.

MOUNTAIN



Moving across a mountain will take many hours of travel and leave you exhausted at the end of your journey.



CITADEL



A strongly fortified city which may resist enemy forces or offer shelter to a friendly army. Storming a citadel will be a hard task.



FOREST



Movement through a forest will not be swift. The warriors of Gondor, however, will find it doubly difficult for forests are the homes of the magical Fey who hold no love for the foul creatures of the Witchling.



TOWER



The refuges of the Wise, the Towers of Midnight, are almost impenetrable from attack but help may be sought in one of these. It may not always be granted.



— HENCE —



Built at the dawn of the world, these ancient temples have strange powers, not always benign.



— VILLAGE —



A village can offer warmth and shelter to the lonely traveller if its people prove friendly.



— DOWNS —



Gently rolling hills, the downs allow a traveller only slightly but they may hide unseen dangers.



— KEEP —



The fortifies of a minor Lord, a keep will offer protection against occasional raids but will not withstand a determined assault for long.



— SNOWHALL —



Built by the wandering peoples of Midnight during the long winter, snowhalls are quite large structures which can offer shelter to many hundreds if need be.



— LAKE —



The remaining lakes of Midnight are fed by warm springs. They have powers to revive and heal those who oppose Doomdark and the forces of cold.



— FROZEN WASTE —



Surrounding the land of Midnight are the Frozen Wastes. They cannot be entered by any Frost, Foul or Fey.



— RUIN —



Abandoned fortresses of former wars, ruins may harbour dark and dangerous things but may at times of need offer some protection against attack.



LITH



These ancient standing stones often have magical powers.

CANYON



A canyon can provide shelter and a hiding place, but it may already have done so for foul creatures!

As well as these features, you will also see the flat expanses of the Plains of Midnight. It is only on the plains that you will actually see the banners and ranks of the armies that march across the land.

ARMY



A friendly army offers no hindrance to the traveller, but an attempt to go through the midst of an enemy army offers the gravest of perils, by day or by night. Armies in mountains, forests or any of the other places to be found will hide themselves well and not be seen.

As you look around during your travels, large figures may appear in the foreground of each panorama you see. These are the warriors, characters or creatures that lie immediately ahead of you on the borders of the next domain. You do not always, however, see all that lies ahead. The wise traveller must be both bold and wary.

Controls at a glance

←	Look	Test/Get Restore Return	Select Choose Think
1	North		
2	Northwest		
3	East	Spacer	Move
4	Southwest		
5	South	S	See
6	Southwest	L	Load
7	West		
8	Northwest	Y	Yes
		N	No
0	Right		
	Run/Stop plus Restore	F1 F3 F5 F7	Look Mark Combat Rathnos
	Restart		

The **Pygtron** is in sole charge of the colony. It assesses the personnel's oxygen needs, it allocates food and work duties. Its defense capability is on the alert for intruders. It pursues droods track down enemy saboteurs which infiltrate the base.

Every aspect of the colony is constantly monitored, every need of its operatives ordered and catered for, every sector visually scanned and its dials eternally probed and scanned.

When the attack comes, **Pygtron** will cope with defensive demands and details which would leave a human brain unchanged, computer circuits scrambled. It needs to for every aspect of the base's existence connected. A failure in one department must be reported and its effect on the fabric of the base assessed immediately.

Human lives will be expended as necessary but if **Pygtron** ever goes down...

The "B" side of the tape contains a taste of **Pygtron**. It is as unique in its own way as *The Lords of Midnight* is.

Pygtron combines arcade standard graphics and action with a game of strategy and tactics which will keep you gripped for months.

We challenge you to take the role of the **Pygtron**, looking after the needs of the *Setsu/S* Installation while repelling an awesome alien attack.

Send pursuit droods racing through tunnels after enemy saboteurs.

Defend the supply ship as it beams down much-needed provisions and personnel.

Move into Freezetime to calculate the base's current status.

Keep repair crews where they are most needed. **Pygtron** is a game of six levels and there's just a taste of the graphics and action in store to be found on the "B" side of the tape.

Type **LOAD**™ and press **ENTER** to see some screens of **Pygtron** action up and running. When you appreciate that this game offers old levels of action, introducing new elements all the time, we hope you'll be convinced that you should rush out and buy it for your Commodore 64 at just £7.95.



Take a step into the Beyond

Go **Beyond** the games alone offered by the rest of the games market. Enter a world peopled by only nameless-games ideas — some available now, others ready soon, some still at the planning stage.

Beyond is putting the accent firmly on originality. We'll only bring out games that take you where no-one has taken you before.

A host of brand new ideas presented with care and attention to detail. Games that will offer a challenge which lasts for months rather than minutes.

Just fill in the card below with your name and address and post it (in a sealed envelope) to **Beyond**, Competition House, Farnham Road, Market Harborough, Leics. LE16 9NR.

We will then keep you informed of new releases for your computer, **Beyond** competitions and special offers.

Please add your comments on this game and let us know your best achievement so far.

Name _____

Address _____

Please keep me informed about new releases for the _____ microcomputers.

Comments _____

Best achievement so far _____

If you wish to purchase another **Beyond** Commodore 64 tape please send a cheque for the required amount with this card and tick the titles you want.

Please send me

	Cassette	Disc	PRICE Cassette	Disc
Say's Say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	69.95	11.95
Pa Warrior	<input type="checkbox"/>		89.95	
Poytton	<input type="checkbox"/>		67.95	
Adric	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	59.95	11.95
Arish	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	69.95	11.95
Mr Robot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	59.95	11.95
MyChess II	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	611.95	19.95
All prices include P&P				

Grand Total = £

Total number of games =

Spy vs Spy

A cartoon adventure featuring the black and white spies from MAD Magazine. Set and defuse traps, search hundreds of maze layouts for the secret briefcase and try to make your getaway at the spy plane. Multiple scenarios for one or two players.

Pit Warrior

The most realistic character on yet seen on the 64! Guide the warrior down into the Pit creature's lair, trying to net the creatures and drain their energy until he becomes powerful enough to Levitate; leave his body to Remote View; Teleport or become Invisible. And at the bottom visit the Source.

My Chess II

The best Commodore 64 chess program. Features nine levels, 3D views of the board, move solving, 128 great games of the past on the disc.

Aukh

Launch your Mindprobe into the unfathomable "Metanet" world of Aukh. Where logic works but doesn't rule and where every portal is a challenge to be probed, pushed and finally persuaded to reveal its treasure, a tool or a new mystery.

Aztec

Devour the Golden Idol from a long lost South American Aztec Temple. Measure, maneuver and cunning traps will test your explorer as he walks, crawls, jumps and fights his way through the brilliantly-animated action. Rated best Action/Adventure game in the U.S.

Mr Robot

Guide Mr Robot through 22 fiendish courses with incredible features and mind-boggling plots. Then create your own screen game design with the single to use Robot Factory and test it out on your friends.

Up the escalator, over the brick wall, jump to the energizer token and destroy the Alienfire, ignite the bomb and into the transporter.



BEYOND

CHALLENGING SOFTWARE

THE LAND OF MIDNIGHT

